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OUTPOSTS OF MERCY

OUTPOSTS OF MERCY

THE RECORD OF A VISIT IN NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER, 1916, TO THE VARIOUS UNITS OF THE BRITISH RED CROSS IN ITALY

BY

E. V. LUCAS

99348

WITH SIXTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

FACING PAGE

ENTRANCE GATES OF THE VILLA TRENTO . . 16

TWO ENDOWED BEDS IN THE VILLA TRENTO HOSPITAL 16

MEMBERS OF THE STAFF OF THE VILLA TRENTO 17

ITALIAN MEDICAL OFFICERS AND B.R.C. AMBULANCE DRIVER IN A RUIN AT MONFALCONE . . 17

A SMALL CLEARING HOSPITAL ON A MOUNTAIN SUMMIT 32

HOSPITAL TENTS IN A GARDEN IN GORIZIA AFTER BEING SHELLED 32

A CAR IN THE SNOW AT TOLMEZZO . . . 33

THE COUNTESS HELENA GLEICHEN AND MRS. NINA HOLLINGS 33

THE DEMOLISHED VILLAGE OF SAN MARTINO ON THE CARSO 48

RUINED AUSTRIAN TRENCHES ON SAN MICHELE . 48

A B.R.C. CAR ON A MOUNTAINOUS ROAD . . 49

B.R.C. AMBULANCES IN AN ALPINE STATION . 49

FACING PAGE

A Carnia Beauty 54

A Snow Image of the late Austrian Emperor ("Cecco Beppe") at Timau . . . 54

A Village in Carnia with a B.R.C. Ambulance Station 55

A Telerifico carrying a Wounded Man . . 55

OUTPOSTS OF MERCY

I

SIR WILLIAM ROBERTSON has recently said, with the light-heartedness of one who is superior to all the restrictions now necessarily put in the way of impulsive travellers, that whenever he is run down or depressed he goes to the front and is healed. A Chief of the Imperial General Staff can do these things; but few others of us are so lucky. Yet can I count myself among those few, for, upon the invitation of Lord Monson, Chief Commissioner of the British Red Cross in Italy, and by the courtesy of the Italian Military authorities, I have recently been permitted to make a tour of the Italian front, comprising the Carso, Gorizia, and the Carnic and Julian Alps. The object was to see the work for the wounded that is being done there both by the mission of the Joint War Committee of the British Red Cross and Order of St. John and by the Italian sanita; but I do not pretend that the untoward and often exciting and always interesting experiences of the trip were anything but sheer holiday to me. And having enjoyed every moment of it, even though some of those moments were spent in the wet saddles of mules, among the snow, I can affirm that Sir William Robertson's knowledge of tonics is profound.

The Chief of our Imperial General Staff means the word front to include the fighting line. I saw but little fighting in Italy, the wintry conditions being unfavourable and most of the energies of the army devoted to preparations for the after-winter campaign; but there was enough to provide the thrills of novelty and danger. The spectacle of the indefatigable Italian soldiers performing astonishing engineering tasks and cheerfully overcoming the most appalling difficulties would alone have been bracing; but to see also one's own countrymen untiringly and self-forgetfully doing such humane and admirable work, often under conditions that are not only harassing but as perilous as those of the fighting men themselves, was even more invigorating. The union of enthusiasm and efficiency must always be impressive, and both are here.

II

THE administration of the British Red Cross, to-day a gigantic organization, as all the world must by now be aware (since no secret has been made of it), is carried on in Pall Mall, but each country into which the new Rosicrucians penetrate has its own office or offices. Those for Italy are situated in a hotel in Rome, and there, when he is not making his rounds of inspection (as he usually is), is to be found the Chief Commissioner, Lord Monson, one of those busy men, so rarely met with, who have time and complete attention for every one, who understand a sentence before the last word is reached, who see things clearly and whole, and who act quickly. After travelling for two weeks with him and observing him in his relations both with the members of the various Red Cross units and the Italian authorities, I look upon his appointment as Chief Commissioner as an inspired one. In the same office in Rome is to be found—always—the Sub-Commissioner, Mr. Hubert Beaumont, through whose hands passes all the correspondence. I say always, and it is true, for he has been so chained to his desk for the last year that he has not yet, as he will tell you, seen the Forum. But for this devotion to duty on the Sub-Commissioner's part, the wheels of the Red Cross in Italy would have run far less smoothly.

Rome, however, is for administration; to see the Red Cross on active service it is necessary to take train to Udine, for long Italy's principal eastern frontier town, but now, by grace of Italy's arms, many miles farther from the Austrian boundary.

Among Udine's arcaded streets I should, under normal conditions, have lost myself with perfect satisfaction; but time was short, and we had much to do, and my knowledge of the town is therefore small and my recollection hazy. But I shall always clearly remember the great mound rising in its centre, on the summit of which is the castello, because this is a castello indeed. By dominating the surrounding country, and by being visible for miles and large enough to contain the inhabitants in times of siege, it obeys the rules. Legend says that Aquila himself decreed it, from which to witness the burning of Aquilegia, whose campanile, on the brilliant afternoon on which we stood on the castello ramparts, was clearly to be seen due south, while a little to the east of it the frowning Carso rose and stretched darkly away; and more easterly still was Gorizia beneath her black mountains reverberating to the cannonade. There, all was warlike; but turning to the north the eye rested only on loveliness and peace, for above the nearer slopes, all quiet in the afternoon sun, rose the glistening snow-topped Alps in breathless pure serenity.

The castello, as I say, dominates the city and the plain; and the castello, in its turn, is dominated by a campanile, on the top of which is a pinnacled angel in a fine free posture with flowing robes and outstretched arm. Like her not very distant sister of

St. Mark's, at Venice, this angel also serves as a vane, and on the golden afternoon of which I speak, the wind being in the east, she was pointing urgently to Austria. A good omen.

For the rest I think of Udine as a foreign town which I was eternally entering or leaving in motor cars—the home, at night, of impenetrable darkness, and, by day, of myriad soldiers among its arches, of an exquisite Venetian loggia, and a limpid restless stream, imprisoned within the walls, which doubles and twists everywhere in its efforts to escape into the country again.

On this first afternoon our object was to obtain certain official documents without which I should not have been allowed to visit the front at all; and having done this, we left Udine for the Villa Trento, a spacious Italian country house, with sentinel cypresses at its gates, which is now both the head-quarters of Unit 1 of the Croce Rossa Britannica and a spacious hospital. At its head is that sincerest of the friends of Italy, Mr. G. M. Trevelyan, surrounded by a devoted staff of doctors, nurses, drivers, and mechanics.

Sitting in the great dining-hall on that first evening, looking at the many faces at the four tables, it struck me how interesting it would be to have biographical details of all these people, brought together in a foreign land by the same motive—the desire to do something for others. And I reflected also on the curious strength of this missionary spirit among my own countrymen and countrywomen, beyond that of any other nation. Another question that flitted across the mind, and one that recurred again and

again on this little tour, was, What would every one here be doing at this moment had the war never broken out? Under the weight of what dull home routine would the blended impulses of altruism and adventurousness that had brought them here be suppressed?

Certain members of the staff were, save for transplantation, doing their own work still: such as Sir Alexander Ogston, of Aberdeen, who, though entitled to honourable repose after his long and busy life as a surgeon, has placed his skill at the service of the Red Cross in this distant spot; and Dr. G. S. Brock, who has temporarily given up his duties as physician to the Embassy in Rome to become C.M.O. here; and Miss Power, the matron, who, after retreating with the Serbians and participating in dreadful hardships, is again in charge of sick and wounded Allies. But the Red Cross, for the most part, I take it, re-creates its helpers. Thus, one of the busiest of the officers at Villa Trento is Dr. Thomas Ashby, who, normally a scholar and an archæologist and the head of the British School in Rome, now thinks only in terms of clothes, bedding, and stores. Mr. Trevelyan himself once wrote books; to-day he is a Commandant, and the blue ribbon of the Italian Medal for Valour illumines his khaki.

Here let me say that the Villa Trento is the only hospital with a British staff that is associated with the British Red Cross in Italy, although that organization has made itself responsible for the equipment of two hospitals with nearly 500 beds on the Isonzo front. Considering the difficulties during a great war of establishing hospitals near the fighting line in a

foreign country, and considering also the unsuitability of the ordinary Italian country house for hospital purposes, the efficiency of the Villa Trento to-day speaks well for the energy of those in charge. The improvised Italian camp or field hospitals that we saw, just behind the front, in great numbers, all show an earnest purpose and not a little adaptive skill, while the larger hospitals in the towns, converted from schools, barracks, convents, and so forth, are very clean and have proved themselves adequate to the heavy strain which has from time to time been placed on them.

My own amateur opinion as to the remarkable efficiency of the Villa Trento hospital is corroborated by the experts. Colonel Santucci, Medical Director of the VIth Army Corps, on a visit of inspection in August, wrote (in Italian): "I have to express my profound admiration for the beneficent work accomplished by our worthy English colleagues on behalf of our wounded soldiers and for the perfect organization of this field-hospital, which is a real model"; while General Angelantonio, the Director of the sanita of the Third Army, visiting in November, used a similar phrase. Colonel Santucci had found the hospital a "veramente modello"; General Angelantonio thought it a "perfetto modello."

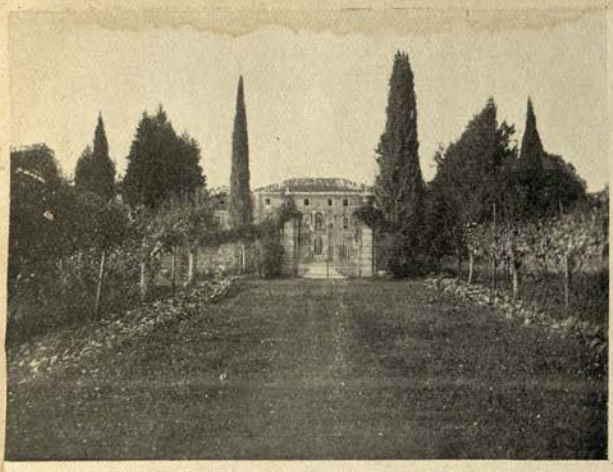
The Villa Trento was the first hospital that I saw, and in one way it set the rule: for the impression gained on passing through the rooms, and especially between those long avenues of beds in the two wards of the converted granary (one of them named the "Garibaldi Ward," with red coats for all the men)—an impression of brown faces and patient luminous

eyes, a little perplexed by it all—recurred and recurred. Whatever hospital we were in, there, always, were the brown faces and the patient luminous eyes, a little perplexed by it all.

As to practical results at the Villa Trento, figures speak more eloquently than words. In Dr. Brock's report for November, 1916, it is stated that the total number of admissions since September 12th, 1915, when the British Red Cross opened the hospital, was 2,889, of which 1,400 were medical and 1,489 surgical cases. The deaths were 46, or 1·6 per cent. Few hospitals anywhere can point to a better record than that.

To Dr. Brock, I ought to say, is due the chief credit of the conversion of the country house into this beneficent haven; but on every hand is visible the influence of the watchful thought and idealism of the author of the best Life of Garibaldi. I consider this little colony of our countrymen and countrywomen, working out there so steadily, and to such fine ends, fortunate indeed in having such a chief; and I think they know it.

In the evening when work is done the Villa turns to a social club. Every one assembles in a large salon, hung, or rather plastered, with unframed oil paintings, stuck on the walls in a solid mass very much as scraps are stuck on a screen. Here are sofas, a piano, English papers, and the works of Jack London, who seems to be the most popular writer wherever ambulances are driven. Conversation, which, at meals (I noticed as we enjoyed the hospitality of unit after unit), has a way of reverting to carburettors and sparking plugs, here leaves those



ENTRANCE GATES OF THE VILLA TRENTO

TWO ENDOWED BEDS IN THE VILLA TRENTO HOSPITAL

MEMBERS OF THE STAFF OF THE VILLA TRENTO
(Sir Alexander Ogston on the right and Dr. Brock in the centre)

ITALIAN MEDICAL OFFICERS AND A B.R.C. AMBULANCE DRIVER IN A RUIN AT MONFALCONE

mysteries and takes a wider range. That Mr. Trevelyan would, by a kind of natural selection, gather around him sterling and independent characters, was inevitable; but (wholly for want of sufficient forethought on the subject) I was not prepared for so vivid an interest in affairs as these earnest motorists now developed. Home politics and the war came of course first and remained last; but, in the intervals, I had with one of them an exciting talk on the works of Mr. Conrad, of whom neither of us can ever read enough; from another, an English landscape artist in times of peace, I heard some vigorous opinions upon modern painting and painters; while a third was eloquent on the commercial possibilities now offered by Italy to any English firm with enough gumption to send out travellers who can speak Italian.

I don't say that if I had had views of any value on the respective merits of Fiats and Buicks I should not have had keener listeners; for it has to be remembered that of the three sources of vitality of the British Red Cross in Italy—enthusiasm being one and money another—petrol is the third. Without each it could have done nothing; with all three it has done marvels and will do more. According to the Commissioner's report which lies before me, the record of the British Red Cross ambulances to the time of our visit to the Villa Trento, at the end of November 1916, was 115,091 wounded or sick men carried, over a total distance of 876,406 kilometres. No wonder, then, that at the back of all these ardent minds one is conscious of the car; but I thought that they unbent to a purely literary man very charmingly.

These evening séances do not, however, last long,

for the Villa is a strenuous place and early hours are kept. Nor was I sorry, after a night in the train, to go also to bed. There, rejecting alike Jack London and the Oxford Anthology of Italian Verse, I sank quickly into a sleep marred only by the incessant rumble of motor-cars and lorries hastening along the high road towards the front with their loads of men or munitions of war.

In saying that the next morning I was glad to get away from the Villa Trento, I must not be misunderstood. I mean only that I could not have borne much longer the shame of being a drone in such a hive. Owing to a deluge of rain I could not go out, and, within, every one was busy. Except for me the great sitting-room was empty until a driver off duty entered and took his seat at one end and a nurse off duty sat near me at the other. The driver instantly resumed the study of Italian from Hugo's manual; the nurse attacked with fury a stocking. Reverently I left them, and then, at every turn in the narrow passages, moved aside to let a useful person, who really meant something, hurry by.

It was time to go. Observers may see most of the game; but they also have their feelings.

III

OUR original intention was to go first to the mountain stations and later to visit the various units of the plain; but the weather was so bad that we decided to make at once for Gorizia. Artistically this was wrong, for it means that instead of finishing on a crescendo of excitement, we began with it.

Before entering Gorizia, it might be well to explain the system of British Red Cross units on the Italian front. Unit I, whose head-quarters are at the Villa Trento, consists of the hospital, garage, and repairing works. Here also much secretarial work is done. At Gorizia are two sections of Unit I, under Ambulance Section Leader Geoffrey Young, who carry wounded to hospitals in that neighbourhood, and a third section, under Mr. Rupert Thompson, is stationed at Caporetto, among the Julian Alps. Unit II, which has for Commander Mr. F. W. Sargent, and is stationed at Tolmezzo, where there is also a motor repairing works, and at five outlying spots in Carnia. Unit III, under Mr. F. Alexander, is stationed at San Valentino in the plain, with branches at Gradisca and Ruda, and serves the Carso. Unit IV consists of a travelling radioscope apparatus stationed at Cormons. Unit V is another radiographic unit, with its head-quarters at Verona, under the command of Mr. Cecil Pinsent; but this I did not see.

While still outside Gorizia, which is now approached by roads screened with matting so that the watchful Austrians on the heights may not see the cars—the matting all brown and sodden on this pouring afternoon, as though a triumphal procession had been blighted—let me make use of Mr. Trevelyan's report of the services rendered by his unit on the occasion of the fall of that Austrian town last summer, not merely to illustrate the readiness-for-anything and disregard of danger which our ambulance men display, but to show how important a part they took in that historic event.

"On August 6th the Italian offensive broke out and with extraordinarily rapid success carried the positions of Sabotino, Oslavia, and Podgora, which we had been watching for a year. During the first three or four days of the offensive the cars were engaged in severe day and night work from their old stations at Quisca, Vipulzano, and Mossa and other new stations in the Mossa neighbourhood. On the evening of the 9th Mr. Geoffrey Young, at that moment officer in charge of the Mossa station, crossed the damaged bridge of the Isonzo into Gorizia with three ambulances and a Ford touring car, and successfully carried wounded back out of the town in circumstances reflecting high credit to all concerned. These were the first ambulances, English or Italian, to enter Gorizia. On the following evening the bulk of the ambulances from Quisca and Vipulzano were brought round over the same bridge and up through Gorizia and cleared the wounded out of Salcano, the village to the north of Gorizia, during

the action of that night. On the following day, the 11th, the ambulances worked in Salcano by daylight under heavy fire, eliciting the special gratitude of Major Bocchia, Commandant of the 10th Section sanita, for whom the work was being done on this day and the previous and following days.

"After that, two houses were secured in Gorizia into which the whole car establishments previously posted at Quisca, Vipulzano, and Mossa were finally moved and have since remained established. During the last half of the month there have been from fourteen to sixteen cars inhabiting the new quarters in Gorizia and working the hospitals and clearing-stations of Salcano and Gorizia, carrying the wounded back across the bridges to the hospitals in the rear. This work is carried out under fire, and the places where the cars are lodged are also subject to bombardment. Since August 10th six cars have been perforated by shrapnel, besides a number of others covered by the débris of bursting shells. Since November last sixteen of our cars have been hit by shells or machine guns."[1]

Now we will enter the town itself, crossing the famous Isonzo by a hastily constructed wooden bridge which an Austrian shell still finds every few hours, but which the incorrigibly undismayed Italian soldiers instantly repair.

In times of peace Gorizia was a favourite health resort of the Austrians—a kind of Harrogate. At the

[1] I should like also to quote Mr. Geoffrey Young's report of the exciting entry of himself and his colleagues into Gorizia, but it has already been more than once in print.

present moment it is deserted save for a handful of inhabitants and many Italian soldiers. The two foes bombard each other all day and all night across its roofs, while every now and then the Austrians remind the town that they could do it infinite mischief if they would.

Mr. Geoffrey Young, who is in charge of the ambulances here, and with whom we stayed, is a quiet, resourceful man of culture well known in the Playground of Europe as a climber, and the author of two volumes of poems which those who possess them greatly prize. One volume, *Freedom*, has long been on my shelves. I never thought to hear the poet explaining to me, in a garden of Gorizia, the difference, as indicated to his trained ears, by the sound of the shells which rushed and screamed over our heads, between those meant by Italians to slaughter Austrians and those meant by Austrians to slaughter Italians.

I must again quote from one of Mr. Trevelyan's reports to explain a little excursion that we made with Mr. Young after dinner. Writing on November 24th last the Commandant says:

"In General Cadorna's dispatch printed in the papers to-day and dated November 23rd occurs the following sentence: 'In the Zona of Gorizia the artillery opened fire on an encampment of a Hospital Section of ours visibly furnished with the symbols of neutrality. Among the patients seven were killed and eleven wounded.' The hospital encampment in Gorizia here referred to had contained 150 patients the night before, all of whom had been removed

across the Isonzo bridges to places of safety by three of our B.R.C.S. cars, that carried the whole 150 during the night in heavy rain and pitch darkness without being allowed the use of lights. It was a fine piece of work and happened to have the effect of saving a considerable number of lives, for a high-explosive shell burst among the hospital tents early next morning, as described by General Cadorna, and killed or wounded all the patients who were in the tents at the time and who had been brought in there that same morning a few minutes before.

"The Italian Medical Officer in charge told me that if our three men had not cleared the 150 out that night, the explosion would have been in the middle of them all instead of in an almost empty hospital, and the result, he said, would undoubtedly have been a frightful massacre."

This was only a few days before we reached Gorizia, and every evening the British Red Cross ambulances were continuing to clear the hospital, the last cases being ready to leave on this very first night of our visit. Everything had to be done in the dark, for it was unsafe, in spite of the road-screeens, to perform the task by day; but the fact that no car might carry a light, together with the precariousness of the crossing of the Isonzo, made the night journey dangerous indeed.

I may say here that this forced groping in the dark is the severest strain that our Red Cross drivers know, and many of them have had serious optical troubles. The older men especially have suffered; so much so that on the Gorizia ambulances only the

youngest (known as the "Cats") were being given night work: a fact to be borne in mind by those who talk lightly of Red Cross activities beginning properly only after forty.

To this hospital, then, in utter darkness, with rain overhead and mud underfoot, amid (so quickly does the human machine become habituated even to the most exorbitant novelties) the now almost monotonous sound of exploding shells, we made our way, following the two ambulances. How we went I have no notion, so black and so strange was it all; but after many twists through the desolate streets we drew up at a house which turned out to be the unfortunate hospital. Entering, we passed through a hall and by the staircase, where mysterious dark figures, almost shades, leaned or crouched, waiting for their turn; while others, more seriously injured, lay on the floor of an adjoining dimly lighted room. All seemed dazed and weary, and suggested vague thoughts of Rembrandt and Dante blended. In the operating-room, hastily converted from whatever Austrian apartment it had been, we found the medical staff, busy with official papers and cigarettes, one of whom, either greatly daring or normally apathetic, led me to the garden and showed me, by lantern light, the traces of ruin caused by the fatal shell.

The last of the ambulances having left, we returned to bed, to learn next morning that the first of them had got over the bridge only by astonishing luck, for a shell had a few moments before carried away one of the central pontoons, and the car had therefore crossed for a yard or so literally on two planks, which by a kind of miracle fitted the wheels.

I might say here that the villa which the Italian commander had put at the disposal of Mr. Young and his colleagues had been a well-known Austrian Pension, and one of its cards setting forth all the usual allurements—"Vorzügliche Küche," "Schattiger Garten," " Mässige Preise"—is before me as I write. I thought this residence sufficiently near the war when I was in it; but it became nearer still two or three nights later, when an Austrian shell hit the next bedroom to the one we had occupied, completely wrecking it. Two of the ordinary occupants were out on duty, but the other, Mr. Hamish Allan, having a thigh badly crushed by the falling masonry, had to be removed quickly to the hospital at the Villa Trento. One result of this occurrence has been the abandonment of the upper rooms, which are now filled with sandbags, while the personnel has retired to the ground floor. To-day it is even possible that the Pension is no more, and that Mr. Young and his brave companions are lodged elsewhere.

The two other British Red Cross detachments at Gorizia were hardly less happily placed, for while our chauffeur stood opposite the house in which other of the ambulance drivers live, waiting for our return from a neighbouring hospital, a shell killed a soldier close by him; while the room in which we slept as the guests of Unit IV had not, on the morning of our departure, when we returned from a tour of hospitals to pack up, an inch of glass left in its windows. Such was daily life in Gorizia in November 1916!

The next morning Mr. Young took us to see one

or two stations where the wounded are picked up by the ambulances, on the Rubbia road, and it was on this little trip that I twice realized, with a wry acceptance, how fine an artist war can be. Art at what a price! The first time was when we came suddenly upon the church of the village of Sant 'Andrea. What this church was like in days of peace I can only conjecture. Austrian village churches are not very beautiful, and it was probably only the ordinary white baroque pile. But to-day, when only its blackened walls and a few fragments of façade rise among the ruined cottages, it is so impressive as to catch the breath. It is as though Mars himself had directed the hand of some super Méryon. And again, just outside Gorizia, the God of War has smashed with an inspired stroke one of the arches of the stone viaduct which carried the railway across the river. Before, it was a straight line, probably the only straight line in all this mountainous rocky district, and a great blemish on the landscape. To-day its fierce irregularity and sense of tragedy make it of that landscape a natural part.

It was on this particular ride that the British Red Cross in Italy ran serious risks of losing its Chief Commissioner, for we met a medical major who insisted upon taking us to see an outlying station for the wounded, which, a night or so before, had been shelled and rendered useless. Mr. Young had already told us of this occurrence, but had deprecated any visit because the road was exposed to fire; but the major was so enthusiastic and eager that to refuse would be ungracious. Since I am here to tell the tale and Lord Monson in Italy is still directing affairs

with his accustomed energy, it follows that we escaped injury; but the Austrians did their best to hit us with five shrapnel shells, and one other, aimed at the road itself, which made a pit only a few yards to the right just before we reached it.

'Of Gorizia itself I must not say much. But it is permitted to mention that the Italian military authorities have performed wonders of organization wholly in the interests of the soldiers' health. One had not hitherto thought of the easy-going and somewhat fatalistic Italians as being particularly strong in sanitation. But that is because one's previous knowledge of Italy has been of an Italy under peace, and therefore under municipal control. Military control is different. Wherever the military are in charge a stern cleansing and orderly renovation instantly set in: due, I should guess, not only to a natural healthiness and paternal interest in the troops, but also to a desire as thoroughly as possible to stamp that healthiness on foreign soil, and to show what capable administrators soldiers can be. The results are noticeable and memorable. Town after town, village after village, did we pass through or visit, all recently taken in their grime from the Austrians and all swiftly and thoroughly transmuted into neat and orderly and efficient homes for Italy's fighting men; and made not only efficient, but having often little decorative touches too, by one or other of the artists found in every Italian regiment. And that is not all. The street names and the café names have also been Italianized. Where Franz-Josef had a strasse, Vittorio Emanuele III now has a via. The Via Maggio 24, the date on which war against Austria

was declared, is very popular. Far up in the Julian mountains, in a tiny and recently Austrian township on the road to Tarvis, I noticed a Via Dante and a Via Garibaldi, the new names being painted with a kind of final neatness on their boards.

In Gorizia the street names remain as they were, for, though it is in Italian hands, it cannot be called Italian so long as the Austrians can shell it, as they seem now to be doing every day. But, as I have said, Italian military methods of order reign there as well as the bombardment permits. But what can a poor medical officer do with his hospital when the windows are shattered twice a week? And what chance has a sick man under such conditions? Possibly by now—in March—the medical activities of the town have been transferred to a safer place.

We saw also the brave efforts which the military government is making for the well-being of the handful of citizens who remain. In a deserted convent, for example, in which a shell has made a huge gaping wound, we found, in the grassy quadrangle, a score of tiny children at kindergarten drill. In one of the rooms was a small class of fair-haired girls being taught by a nun; and in an adjoining room were as many smiling little boys. And all the time the cannons roared. These were the only signs of civic life. For the rest, Gorizia was dead, most of the houses being pock-marked by shrapnel and all shuttered. Here a big hotel stood, empty and broken; there a café, with its plate glass gone. Tram lines, but no trams. A railway, but no trains.

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IV

AND now of Unit IV I must speak. Unit IV consists of two intrepid ladies, a motor-car or so, a soldier servant or so, and a movable X-ray apparatus. For nearly a year, when I met them—and now for more than a year, for they began in December 1915—these ladies, the Countess Helena Gleichen and Mrs. Nina Hollings, have been passing quickly from field-hospital to field-hospital with their merciful van-load of magic, and thus making possible swift and accurate operations which, but for them, would in many cases either never have been performed at all, or have been dangerously, if not fatally, delayed.

I don't know to whom the credit is due for first seeing the possibilities of a mobile installation of this kind, but few thoughts for the amelioration of the soldier's lot can have been happier. Certainly no two practitioners of the mystery can ever have worked with industry more untiring or with greater zeal than these two ladies.

To see Unit IV at work is the very remarkable experience which we had on our second evening. Outside the hospital, in the inevitable darkness, was the motor-carriage containing the dynamo. From this an indiarubber pipe wound its way along a passage and so into a little room where people moved like silhouettes against a faint fluorescence, and where

there was no sound but the buzzing of the sparks. By degrees one could make out the dramatis personæ of this shadowy play. Sitting by the wall, with her hands controlling the current, was Mrs. Hollings. In a corner was one of the orderlies watching the machinery. On a stretcher in the centre was a powerful Italian soldier stripped to the waist, above whose body the other necromancer was passing a luminous square of glass. Beside her stood the two medical officers of the hospital, the captain and the lieutenant. It was Rembrandt again: "The School of Radioscopy."

Leaning by the side of the operator, over the wounded man, I was able to share her field of vision. For some time the bullet, or piece of shrapnel, or whatever object it was, eluded us; and then suddenly with a little shout of exultation she announced its discovery. The next thing was to adjust a moveable plummet immediately over the spot on the square of glass, turn on the ordinary light, slide the glass away, and—for the surgeon's guidance on the morrow—immediately beneath the plummet, now swinging no more, to mark the man's skin with an indelible pencil. This mark would tell the surgeon that somewhere below it a foreign substance was lodged. But it would tell him only that. Necessary also to inform him how deeply he must cut, and for this purpose the man was moved on to his side, and again the search was begun: this being a more prolonged task, since he was a big man and the rays had therefore the greater distance to penetrate. With the marking of the second spot the proceeding was finished, and case No. 3423 on Unit IV's books

(not bad for two ladies in a foreign war zone in a little under a year!) was carried back to his bed, and case No. 3424 was brought in. Since this poor fellow was, however, in great pain and the splinter very small, it was decided that he must be photographed — a less interesting proceeding for the spectator.

That night we were the guests of Unit IV, and I looked through the album in which some of their most remarkable photographs are preserved, and heard the story of a recent adventure, told with the utmost simplicity as though quite a matter of course. A shell had fallen among some soldiers beside the road, and the ladies had arrived just in time to comfort one or two who were dying, and carry the others to a hospital. This and similar deeds won for them the Medal for Valour.

V

ON leaving Gorizia, which it is possible for a mere civilian to do very reluctantly, so exciting and novel are (to him) the conditions there, we made for Gradisca, where a detachment of Unit III is stationed. Unit III, the rest of which we were to visit at San Valentino, its head-quarters, and at Ruda, serves the Carso front, bringing the wounded principally to the hospitals at Gradisca and Sagrado, both of which towns were recently Austrian, but will never, I hope, be Austrian again. To Sagrado, which is on the Isonzo, immediately under the Carso, we were to go on the morrow: to-day Gradisca and San Valentino.

At Gradisca Mr. Cookson and his colleagues are lodged in rooms in vast barracks, part of which is now a hospital, and we were met by the melancholy news that Mr. Smith, the driver of one of the ambulances, was now a patient there in consequence of burns following upon the explosion of a petrol tin. His injuries were serious, for the calamity occurred far from help; but we found him bearing them with fortitude and very grateful for all that was being done for him. He looked, however, very ill. Accidents had hitherto been almost unknown in the service, whose luck indeed has been a proverb among the Italians; but this week, as I have already shown, was to see yet another, for the shell which maimed

A SMALL CLEARING HOSPITAL ON A MOUNTAIN SUMMIT

HOSPITAL TENTS IN A GARDEN IN GORIZIA AFTER BEING SHELLED

A CAR IN THE SNOW AT TOLMEZZO

THE COUNTESS HELENA GLEICHEN (ON THE RIGHT) AND MRS. NINA HOLLINGS

Mr. Allan at Gorizia exploded on the following night.

The Italian authorities have seen to it that all the British Red Cross units and branches are comfortably lodged and waited upon, a sufficient number of soldier servants being apportioned to each. The Italians provide also rations, petrol, oil, new tyres, and a certain amount of repairs. The rest of the expense is borne by the Red Cross itself, and when I say that the number of cars when we were on our little tour was ninety-six, you will realize that, apart altogether from the needs of the hospital at the Villa Trento, generous funds are required to maintain the service.

To return to the question of the units and branches, no one who knows anything of colonies of vigorous young men will need to be told that of all the servants it is the cook in whom interest chiefly centres, and there is an amusing rivalry between the various settlements in this matter. Each, I need hardly say, has the best cook.

The head-quarters of Unit III at San Valentino are among the pleasantest of all—a farm-house in the midst of a plain as level as the Fens, standing alone much as an English homestead does. The garden door leads not only to the garden, but to the wide wide world. Here at night, looking east, I watched the Austrian shells bursting, only five or six miles away, over Monfalcone or Doberdo, and then the signal lights from the Austrian trenches for the gunners' guidance next time.

We had a cheery dinner with Mr. Alexander and his men, cooked by a capable merry soul who had

been a carabiniere, and then were shown the best assortment of war relics which I saw anywhere—the collection of these trophies being naturally a hobby with almost every ambulance driver. Mr. Alexander showed me a terrible club with iron spikes at the end, which the Austrians are accused of using in unspeakably brutal ways; while I saw also some of those malignant iron stars—caltrops is their scientific name—with sharp rays four inches long, one of which always points upward, that are sown about the ground to trip up and lame and horribly injure the oncoming charging foe.

Austrian aeroplanes are constant visitors to San Valentino and neighbourhood, but that night we were not disturbed.

The next morning, which broke fine and clear, we rose early, for a long day was before us and we were due at the office of Colonel Faralli, medical chief of the Army Corps, at Gradisca at nine. That shrewd and vigilant officer, who has charge of the sanita arrangements for the whole of this district, was waiting, and we changed into his car and were whirled off to Sagrado to see some of the admirable provisions made for the comfort of the troops when they leave the trenches, weary, stiff, and stained. With that dispatch which is a characteristic of the Italian soldier, who comes to all reconstructive, adaptive, and transforming work with extraordinary readiness, Sagrado has been converted into a very centre of hygiene. We watched a batch of men being renovated. In one great room—of I know not what building when Austria owned the town—they undressed; in the next they stood naked, fifty at a

time, under a series of hot douches, and were most gratefully besprinkled and cleansed; in the next fresh clothes were awaiting them. Meanwhile their own old clothes were on the way to disinfection in neighbouring ovens set up for the purpose, and their boots were being dried. It was all a little rough, but it was efficient. And the good-humour of the men was infectious. Here once again I noticed what excellent teeth there are in the Italian Army.

At a neighbouring hospital I was shown a flower-bed in which an Austrian shell had fallen while the yard or garden was full of victims of a gas attack waiting to be attended to. Had the soft earth not received it, but the hard gravel a foot or so beyond, the effects on the poor fellows would have been terrible; but, as it was, no loss of life was caused.

Colonel Faralli, being a very busy man, here left us, having first provided a guide to the Carso in the person of a young lieutenant; and off we went on this most absorbing journey. The Carso, I should say, which rises suddenly from the plain—as suddenly as the South Downs from the weald of Sussex—is a great system of hills and valleys a few miles wide east and west, and many miles long north and south, where nothing grows but rank grass among volcanic rocks. The northern end of this barren but strategically fruitful range now belongs to Italy, won inch by inch in fierce and bloody contest, too many witnesses to which lie still for ever in the long series of new graveyards between the slope and the Isonzo. The remainder of the Carso, which is still Austrian, it is Italy's great desire to win, for once she can do that Trieste will be hers.

It was a brilliant day, sunny and frosty, and above us were floating a series of observation balloons watching the Austrian batteries over the crest of the hills. A new road—one of the hundreds of new roads which these untiring Italians have made during the war—now winds through the wooded slope to the Villa Hohenlohe, recently a country residence, but now a ruin, and then runs up and down to San Martino, recently a prosperous village, but now only a mass of stones from which a few walls emerge: the scene of one of the most bitterly fought battles. The road stopping here, we went on foot for the rest of the way to the summit of San Michele.

Nowhere before had I received so vivid an impression of the wastefulness of war, for the ground is literally covered for some square miles with the costly débris of modern conflict. Not a step could one take without treading on metal—shells, cartridges, barbed wire—and as some of the shells had not exploded when they fell, and the Italian soldiers have been too busy ever since with their myriad other tasks to find time to explode them, we had to walk with the greatest circumspection. Agag did not step more delicately. Here and there were little knots of men sorting out such articles as contained ingredients useful to melt down and employ destructively again; here and there were men busy with a field telephone wire; but for the rest the place was a desert. It seemed monstrous that the most glorious sunshine that I had seen in Italy should be falling on this blighted scene of carnage and hate.

I have called the Carso a scrap-heap of old iron, but old leather is not much less noticeable there;

and it suddenly occurred to me, as I stumbled about among it, how important a part in warfare is taken by animals' hides. With all our glory as lords of creation, with all our wireless telegraphy, our flying machines, our submarines, and our long-range guns, we are utterly dependent on the beasts of the field. Heirs of the ages though we are, we still cannot go out to battle without first flaying a cow.

Meanwhile we were steadily climbing, our guide occasionally pointing to objects of interest—such as, in one spot, an Austrian grave so shallow that the poor wretch's boots protruded—and occasionally calling out a warning not only as to an unexploded shell, but also as to half-concealed Austrian trenches or barbed wire. How a trench could be dug here at all is a mystery, for it is all rock; but there they are, another testimony to the determination of man when killing another man is his object. Some one has calculated the thousands of miles of useful canals that could now be the world's if all the spade work put into trenches during this war had been diverted to that other and pacific and beneficent end. I thought again of this fantastic Utopian alternative as, close to the summit of San Michele, we passed in single file through a system of trenches and realized what Herculean labour even these represented. Marvellous indeed is it that kings can get men to fight for them; but (to me) more marvellous that they can get men to dig for them.

We had come, not far from the forlorn vestiges of San Martino, upon a rude monument of stones and shell cases, marking the site of a desperate hand-to-hand encounter, with some rough lettering upon it,

stating that it was to commemorate the bravery of the conquerors—the 47th and 48th Ferrara brigades. And on the very top of San Michele we found a soldier artist putting the finishing touches to another of these monuments, but a more elaborate one: a cement obelisk bearing an inscription of which this is a free English paraphrase: "The Fusiliers of the 19th Brigade, by merit of invincible valour, seized Cima IV (Summit IV) by assault from the enemy on August 6th, 1916, reconquering it for Italy with their best blood." A proud monument—some day probably to be superseded by one in stone—in a proud position, for Cima IV stands some 850 feet above the sea-level, and from it one sees all Friulia, and beyond, hanging in the sky, the magical Alps; while just across the plain below, looking in a north-easterly direction over the Isonzo, which is half blue water and half yellow shingle, is Gorizia, another of the spoils of Italian victory.

The sun was hot, the air was soft, but there was no peace; for not only were the guns busy over Gorizia, but all the time that we were retracing our steps through this amazing museum of warfare (as it might be called) shrapnel was bursting around some too daring Italian aeroplanes investigating the Austrian lines a mile or so away. None were hit. How much good Austrian money I saw with my own eyes vainly expended on that morning, I have no means of computing; but enough to keep many poor families in comfort for many months.

After lunch with Mr. Cookson and his men at Gradisca, where we learned that Mr. Smith was apparently no worse, we joined Colonel Faralli once

more, for a personally conducted tour of the Vallone, a long valley which bisects the upper end of the Carso from Rubbia in the north to Monfalcone in the south, and which was then the scene of bewildering activity on the part of the Italians preparing for next spring. Much should I like to write of what we saw, but it is outside the scope of this pamphlet, and, moreover, is inexpedient. I may say, however, that I never admired the Italians more, and expect never again to obtain such an impression of an army of construction. That this people are the inspired engineers of the world is beyond any question.

The Colonel had remarked grimly, as we passed under the ruined villa of Rubbia, desolate on its rock, that the road we were about to take was "pericoloso"; but nothing happened. Just, however, as two hours later, we left the valley and turned west towards Sagrado, over the high ground, after the most profoundly interesting ride I have ever had, five shells fell behind us.

That evening we dined at Ruda, with Mr. W. F. Chesterton (a cousin of "G. K. C.") and his detachment, who are very comfortably installed in a farmhouse in the village. Of this dinner I could say much, but refrain. Let it suffice that the cook who ministers to the needs of these gentlemen once officiated on a liner between Italy and India and knows his business. War of course brings men home from all parts; on the hospital train which we saw at San Giovanni the cook had been in the Euston hotel kitchens for fourteen years.

The next morning, which again was limpidly and tenderly fine, we made first for Cervignano, a station

on the railway, in the hope of finding an ambulance train and the ladies of Mrs. Henry Watkins's mission at work upon it. We found three of the ladies—Mrs. Gordon Watson, Miss Hulton, and Miss Talbot—but there was no train, and I therefore say nothing here of this most interesting and humane service, but wait until our visit to Mrs. Watkins herself, a few days later, at the station of San Giovanni di Manzano. I merely remark that the wonderful missionary spirit of our countrywomen was never better exemplified than in the devoted toil of this little band, half of whom live at San Giovanni and half here at Cervignano, which is a constant target for Austrian aeroplanes: their home being a tiny wooden cottage beside the rail, just big enough for the fires which boil the coffee and milk for the poor fellows in the trains, and anything but big enough for the ladies to dwell in comfort. What the soldiers in an English hospital train stopping at a village station in Essex, say, would think of three Italian ladies, unassisted, carrying hot coffee and bread from bunk to bunk along two or three hundred yards of compartments, I cannot imagine; but the grateful Italians have come to look upon the converse phenomenon without surprise.

In the absence of a hospital train to inspect, we were so daring as to take two hours' sheer holiday, in order, being so near, to visit the ancient city of Aquileia, or Aquilegia. It was our first of only two such liberties, the second being when we stopped at Cividale for a few minutes to see the Tempietto. Of Aquileia, the Mother of Venice, I may not write here, for this is a record of serious endeavour, but I must

just mention that we were fortunate in our impulse, for only on the previous day had a new piece of mosaic been laid bare—not mystical and emblematic of spiritual things as is the famous pavement of the church, but the materialistic floor of some Roman governor's house, on the site of which, centuries later, yet still centuries ago, the campanile was built. Recent digging has brought this floor to light, with a few inches of wall decorated in the Pompeian manner. Considering how long the designs on this pavement have been under the earth, the freshness of their colour is amazing. There is yet much more to uncover, but the portion now on view contains the liveliest representation of a langouste, and beside it of a bird, splendid in green and blue plumage, which no doubt was delicate eating or it would not have been there.

The church is too remarkable to be touched upon casually, but I might say that a head of Christ by a soldier-sculptor has recently been placed within; and over the door is a noble sentiment, recently set there by the conquerors of the historic city, which runs, in English: "The blood of our dead pulses again in us, seeing that their work has been completed by victory." And I should like to add that one of the first measures taken by the Italians after they had captured Aquileia was to send up from Rome a representative of the "Belli Arti," with military rank, to take charge of the art treasures. How different from the attitude of the Germans!

So fine was the day that before leaving this pleasant plain for the mountains, whither we were now bound, we climbed the campanile of the neighbouring village

of Morosino for a glimpse of the Promised Land. It was clear enough, perhaps, had we chosen the right hour, to see Venice herself—but the west was hazy. In the south, however, the crowded slopes of Trieste, the desired city, were visible enough. Not only could we see Trieste, but we could see also only too distinctly the difficult country that lies between her and the gallant Italians. Much has to be done before all those heights can be captured, but that they will fall is my belief.

VI

OUR road lay through Udine, which, since the British Military Mission there has excellent tea, we were always glad to visit again, and then steadily up a hilly road to Tolmezzo, fifty miles due north, through some little towns of which Gemona is the most famous. It is indeed famous enough to have been included in that admirable series of monographs on the artistic centres of Italy which a Bergamo publisher issues; but although four times did we thread its steep and narrow streets, we were always too pressed to be able to stop. I mention this as a proof of virtue.

At Tolmezzo, which we found under snow and which glories in the reputation of being the wettest spot in all Italy, is stationed Unit II. Mr. F. W. Sargent, who is at its head, is by long residence in Italy peculiarly fitted for such a post—not the least part of the duties of a Red Cross Commandant being to establish close relations with his military neighbours. This is everywhere the rule; but it struck me that the officers whom we met at the Tolmezzo mess table were more intimately interested in the British branch of the Italian Army (as these ambulance drivers might be called) than any that we met elsewhere. But all, wherever we met them, were courteous and helpful, even where they might not

fully understand the motives at the back of so disinterested a service so far from home.

With Mr. Sargent, on the occasion of my visit, were Mr. Hill, who drives one ambulance, Mr. Haynes Jones, who drives another, and Mr. Warburton, a motor cyclist; but Mr. Haynes Jones has now, I believe, removed to a distant mountain outpost where the roads are too steep for the Italian cars, Unit II's region of activity being the Carnic Alps.

Mr. Sargent, when Mars is not in the ascendant, is a sculptor, with a studio in Florence, and he has employed some of his spare time at Tolmezzo in modelling the figure of a bomb-thrower, which, cast in cement, has now a place of honour in the motor park of the garrison, and is not only a fine spirited statue, but a visible token of the bond existing between the Italian army and the British Red Cross.

After paying various calls of ceremony on the military authorities, which the Chief Commissioner is punctilious in doing, we drove off, through the snow (which some very pretty girls were engaged in scraping from the roads), to Saletto, a tiny village in a mountain valley so steep that the sun's rays can reach it only during five months of the year, and, I suppose, one of the remotest stations of the British Red Cross not only in Italy, but anywhere.

Our first stop was at Moggio, where a medical major displayed his little hospital with a proper pride, and then, passing through Chiusaforte, up steep and winding ways, amid wild and wonderful scenery, we came, at dark, at a temperature far below freezing-point, to our destination.

The solitary Saletto ambulance is driven by Mr.

Cowdy, an Irish gentleman who lives alone with a stove in one room in this wintry hamlet, and is ready day and night for the call of duty. With anything but a copious flow of Italian, he has become friendly with every one in the place, civil and military, and I should not be surprised if his prowess as a driver becomes legendary and will be spoken of in the valley years after the war is over.

That night we dined with the Colonel and his staff, and the next morning (rising at six in pitchy darkness) I witnessed some of Mr. Cowdy's driving skill, and also the triumph of the Buick car, for he took us through the deep snow up a noble new road which these marvellous Italian engineers have made in the shortest possible time. It has no fewer than fifteen hairpin bends in it, only one of which can be negotiated without backing, and when this is borne in mind, and also the fact that at intervals on the journey were notices warning the travellers to beware of avalanches, it will be realized that Red Cross driving in Carnia is not the safest or most luxurious of voluntary tasks. For months, all unaided, has Mr. Cowdy been ascending this perilous mountain road for wounded men, often in storms and in pitchy darkness, and bringing them in safety to the beds awaiting them. Mr. Cowdy and his Buick, as I say, attacked it lightly; but it is beyond the power of any Italian car—a circumstance causing no little satisfaction to the Chief Commissioner at my side.

It was as I sat in the ambulance on this journey, and watched the cool efficiency of the driver, that again, and perhaps most vividly, the extreme un-

likelihood if not impossibility of the converse of all this British Red Cross activity ever happening was presented to me. Here was a young man, disqualified by an accident for war, accepting the conditions of a hermitage and risking his life and health daily for the wounded of another race. Given a war at home, how can one imagine the arrival of a solitary Italian and his car among us for a similar purpose? It is incredible. And from that I pondered again on the curious quality possessed by the English and Irish which sends them forth to all the corners of the earth, to do uncomfortable things gladly. Whence comes this adventurous altruism? The inquiry is not irrelevant, for the whole Red Cross movement is thus, and only thus, accounted for.

Of what awaited us at the top of the mountain I should like to speak, and how we were entertained by the Colonel of the Alpini and his staff and shown many secrets; but this is neither the place nor the time. Enough that, hospitable and cordial as we always found Italian soldiers, none can exceed the Alpini in these respects. One little incident, to which no censor could object, I may, however, mention. The Colonel at Saletto had put at our service, as a cicerone, a young Sicilian medical lieutenant, who, perhaps from geographical reasons, these brumal altitudes being so unlike his sunny island, and possibly from other and deeper causes, was obviously, on that snowy freezing morning, not a happy man. Silent and thoughtful he sat as we climbed and twisted up the pass. And then, at the top, suddenly we heard a shout, and through the snow a soldier came running, and then another, and a

third, and all, breathless, clung to the back of the ambulance and clasped the lieutenant's hand. He gave the briefest of greetings to them, but they dropped away content. "They are Sicilians," he explained; and I saw that his great Southern eyes were dim with tears. The relations of the Italian officers, and particularly of the lieutenants, with their men are noticeably close and often most charmingly tender; but I witnessed no other scene to compare with this.

At Tolmezzo we were intending to stay two or three days more and visit other outposts; but fate had willed otherwise. Tragedy had intervened, That very afternoon a telegram arrived to say that Mr. Smith, the driver at Gradisca who had been burned, had succumbed to his injuries, and, the Chief Commissioner naturally wishing to be present at his funeral, we hastened down to the Villa Trento, in the plain, once more. As it happened, we were, however, not in time for the funeral, which had been hurried and was already over; but the next morning we walked through the cemetery at Gradisca—one of how many new cemeteries!—and saw the grave, in a specially reserved Protestant corner, heaped high with flowers from Italian officers and the tributes of the unfortunate brave fellow's own companions. And then I passed among the hundreds of other neatly arranged and carefully tended graves of fallen Italian soldiers—mostly with wooden crosses, but not a few already marked (such is the abundant energy of this people) by monuments in cement, often too florid, but always testifying not only to reverence, but to the artistic exuberance of the race.

Wonderful that with so much to be done for the living there should be found time, or that time should be made, to bestow upon the dead; but how much time has been thus found, and how thoughtfully and beautifully expended, all those new graveyards tell. And nowhere does one see so many as round and about Sagrado; among them, the grimmest of all, just under the hill near the river, those in which the victims of a surprise gas attack on the Carso lie, who perished in such numbers that each grave holds forty or fifty bodies.

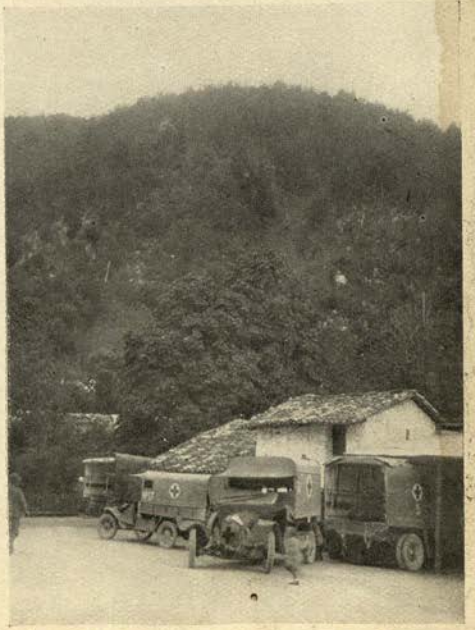
Of the terrible morning on which this gas attack was made I was told by a Red Cross driver, who with his own eyes saw hundreds of men stagger into a hospital yard and die as they fell. The other Italians were, he said, furious, and vowed to use every kind of retaliation on any Austrians they could catch; but when some wounded Austrians were brought to the same hospital soon after, they were treated with as much care as any one else. The Italian may be a fury in hot blood; but by nature he is kind, and the spectacle of suffering moves his heart.

Setting forth again from the Villa Trento, we made for Caporetto, passing through the fascinating town of Cividale in Friulia, where in happier times I should naturally have lingered. Caporetto stands high in the Julian Alps, well over the Austrian border, and we had the pleasure, when crossing the frontier on the road thither, of noticing that one of the posts of demarcation had been removed. The Italian post is still there, with "Il Regno d' Italia" on it. But the other? Surely that must be a great moment

THE DEMOLISHED VILLAGE OF SAN MARTINO ON THE CARSO

RUINED AUSTRIAN TRENCHES ON SAN MICHELE

A B.R.C. CAR ON A MOUNTAINOUS ROAD



[B.R.C. AMBULANCES IN AN ALPINE STATION
(Monte Nero in background)

when such landmarks are uprooted and borne away!

At Caporetto is a British Red Cross station in the charge of Mr. Rupert Thompson, with whom were Mr. Seal, Mr. Nathan, and Mr. Wood, all most enviably waited on by a Bolognese servant with special ways with macaroni. Here, in the raw darkness of the next morning, we mounted mules to climb to Drezentza, since the magnificent new road, on which a civil army is feverishly at work, was not yet ready for ambulances.

What the motor-car is to the Italian army on its level lands, the mule is among the heights. Without mules (and—again—leather) this war could not be waged in the mountains at all. Nothing that has been done to fortify the high places and lodge and feed the soldiers could have been done but for mules. In a different sense from that in which the saint spoke of his brother the ass, but no less fervently, can General Cadorna refer to his brother the mule. As for the mules kindly put at our disposal by various commanding officers, they were singularly tractable and showed far less affection for the precipice side of the path than legend avers.

At the town of Drezentza an eminent Italian surgeon, Major Pomponi, has been allowed a free hand with the sanita arrangements, and most admirably has he performed his task. The town, which stands high among the mountains, was until very recently Austrian. It is now a centre of constant activity, and so busy have the soldiers been with their rebuilding, whitewashing, tree-planting, and general new orderliness, that when the Austrian mayor was

brought back, for some business purpose or other, he rubbed his eyes and wondered where he could be: his own idea of municipal fitness being, on the approach of the enemy, to bury certain documents and other civic valuables with a salted pig. Efficiency is the mark of the Drezentza of to-day; but here again the Italian artist is visible, one of the soldiers, amid all the essentials now demanded of cement, having found time or made time to design and erect a very pretty cement fountain close to head-quarters. We saw this admirable artificer at work, his quick capable hands lovingly shaping a most serviceable bath for one of the hospitals, and he was delighted to be congratulated.

Above Drezentza is the little village of Ravna, where another hospital has been hastily prepared. It consists chiefly of wooden huts, very thoroughly warmed, but the little church has been commandeered too, and we found a few beds in it, all occupied. If churches are to be pressed into the service of war, this surely is their true function.

Before leaving this district I should like to indulge myself by recalling an incident which occurred at the hospitable officers' mess to which we were invited to dine on our last evening at Caporetto. It has nothing to do with the work of the Red Cross, but it is so bound up with my memories of that work and of the kindly Italian officers who entertained us, of whom this Alpine mess may stand as a symbol, that I really must be permitted to break the narrative in order to tell it. For such meals were an integral part of our pilgrimage. Never shall I forget our many hosts—the heartiness of their welcome, the heartiness of their

eating, their sparkling merry eyes as they chaffed each other; and I had the silent observer's exceptional opportunity to see and absorb these things.

To get the story right we must go back to the fifth century A.D., when an unknown Greek sculptor made an unknown and beautiful woman his model for one of the loveliest statues in the world, two photographs of which are on my table as I write. After obscurity and vicissitude, during which the figure lost her head, arms, and other accessories, it was discovered in Tripoli in the early nineteen-hundreds, in due course taken to Rome, and under the title "The Venus of Cyrene," set in a place of honour in the Thermæ of Diocletian. There I had seen her for the first time a few weeks earlier; after that to visit her again and again and again during my stay.

For there is nothing like it. The Venus of Cyrene has not the superb dignity and calm superhuman aloofness of the Venus of Milo, but she has a charm that in its way is as wonderful, and in no other statue that I have seen has the sculptor come so near to the miracle of turning flesh to stone or stone to flesh. For all its fifteen hundred years of age, there is a sensitiveness about this marble which goes beyond anything that these eyes have rested upon.

Now and then, as every one has of course noticed, chance plays into one's hands in such a way as to promote a friendliness or understanding more complete and swift than anything that could have been brought about by intention or design, whether in words or action, and this is what occurred to me in that extemporised dining-saloon amid the snow on that exceedingly chilly night. As always happened

at our luncheons or dinners with this staff or that, Lord Monson was put on one side of the commanding officer and I on the other. Lord Monson, speaking Italian not much less fluently than English, and very acceptably to Italians, did the talking, while I, who am no linguist and never shall be, either said nothing and passed the Chianti or, where French was understood, contrived to exchange a remark or so. On this particular evening the host, who, by the way, had known long and distinguished service in Tripoli, had plenty of French; but since he was more of a soldier than a conversationalist, there were several silent pauses, particularly when Lord Monson was engaged by the officer on the other side of him.

It was during one such pause that chance came to my aid in the most astonishing way; for, without any premeditation whatever, but merely expressing aloud a thought which a few minutes' general conversation on Rome had suggested to my mind, I said to the general that the first thing that I intended to do on reaching the Eternal City again, next week, was to pay another visit to the most lovely thing it contained—the Venus of Cyrene.

Never was speech so much the export of a clear sky, yet never could a pronouncement have been more opportune or electric. At these very ordinary words the general's somewhat stern military features relaxed and a moisture of enthusiasm dimmed his eyes. Then he spoke. "I," he said, "it was I who discovered that statue!"

Could anything have been better? Instantly we were intimate where we had been so formal, and in the excitement of the moment I did what I have never

done before with a person so illustrious, and shall probably never do again—I clapped my hand on his shoulder. The mess shivered and turned pale; but I couldn't help it, so momentous did it seem to meet such a man. Under ordinary conditions I should, for taking such a liberty, no doubt have been ordered out and shot; but the freemasonry of enthusiasm, the sacred laws of hospitality, or Venus herself, saved me.

Leaving the Julian Alps we made one more journey to Tolmezzo and Carnia, this time to visit Timau, a squalid village just under the frontier, with two little hospitals, and two British Red Cross cars driven by a father and son, who, like their kinsman, Mr. Cowdy of Saletto, are Irish. A father and son, one over military age and one under it, form an unusual partnership in such work as this, and these two, so like each other in form, though of different generations, must often speculate with amusement on the circumstances which suddenly took them from their Irish home and all its peaceful routine and set them to live alone among foreigners in a bombarded Alpine village, fetching wounded Italians day and night from the mountain trenches. The chances and tangents of life were never more strikingly before me than in the presence of these two, talking in their cool brogue amid such alien scenes. Their bedroom hangs perilously over a river, which, in spring, is a rushing torrent; Mr. Trevelyan's Life of Garibaldi was, loyally, on a table between the beds, and I fancied them contesting for it in the night. A few days before I was there a shell had come over the peaks from an Austrian battery and demolished two

houses a few yards away, and on our run in his ambulance Mr. Pringle, the father, showed me the spot where, waiting recently at a roadside hut for some wounded, he counted forty shells bursting around him, but was unharmed.

The son had just been mentioned in dispatches for a fine act of devotion. In a recent time of emergency, when the wounded were many, he insisted on rising from his bed in the middle of the night, while ill with jaundice, in order to drive the second car. Twice he had to return to bed, owing to faintness, but his will forcing him out a third time, he mounted the car and carried through his task. Did I say that his age is seventeen?

At Timau the snow was deep and some of the soldiers had amused themselves by constructing a snow effigy of the late lamented Francis Joseph, under his familiar nickname Cecco Beppe. To have chosen snow as the medium seemed to me an act of great magnanimity.

While we were with the military major, looking at his brave little hospitals in this desolate place, a call came to Mr. Pringle to fetch at once a wounded man who was coming down from the mountain trenches by telerifico—one of those overhead wire railways which have been put up since the war, under incredible difficulties, for the conveyance of food, munitions, barbed wire, timber, and so forth from the valley to the trenches on the heights, and, in certain cases, of wounded downwards to the valley. Mr. Pringle had his ambulance out and ready in no time, and we accompanied him. On reaching the telerifico station we found, however, that the

A CARNIA BEAUTY

A SNOW IMAGE OF THE LATE AUSTRIAN EMPEROR ("CECCO BEPPE") AT TIMAU

(Lord Monson in the middle. The author on the right)

[A VILLAGE IN CARNIA WITH A B.R.C. AMBULANCE STATION]

A TELERIFICO CARRYING A WOUNDED MAN

wounded man was coming by road, and soon we saw against the snow a little procession of mules and soldiers, in the waning light, winding down the mountain. The poor fellow, an officer, badly shot, was carried by four stalwart bearers, who made nothing of it at all and did not even show signs of relief when we took over their burden. We returned slowly over the jolting road, to find, when an examination was made at Timau, that the wound was so serious that the officer must go on for treatment at a better-equipped hospital. To this an Italian Red Cross ambulance bore him.

VII

I CLOSE this little account of the fine enterprise of my fellow-countrymen and countrywomen under the Red Cross in Italy, with a word or two about the work that is being done by Mrs. Henry Watkins, who is not associated with our Red Cross, but has an independent mission of her own, in which a few friends assist her and of which General Cadorna is a sympathetic patron.

We had a glimpse, you will remember, of three ladies in a little pretty wooden hut at Cervignano station, waiting for an ambulance train to come in, so that they might carry hot coffee and rolls to every passenger. Now let us meet the organizer and moving spirit of this mission, Mrs. Watkins, herself, in another hut, at the station of San Giovanni di Manzano, a few minutes' drive from the Villa Trento.

But first I would say that most of us, I suppose, if not all of us, have, during the war, been confronted by the question, To what extent are certain of the amenities of the soldiers' life for which donations are asked necessary? And while no one would grudge the fighting man any pleasures or luxuries that public or private munificence can add to his lot, a graduated scale of their importance has to be conceded. Not all are equally useful or merciful. But no doubts as to

usefulness and mercifulness could assail any one observing Mrs. Watkins and her helpers distributing food and drink in an ambulance train; especially as the authorities have had to make the meal time-table inflexible, so that a wounded man, brought in just too late for, say, breakfast, would have no chance of food until lunch, even though he had long been fasting.

The train that we saw had come from I know not where—probably Cormons—taking on its batches of broken men at each station. At San Giovanni di Manzano, where we now are, it is complete, and starts in earnest for Milan. The San Giovanni contingent had been brought to a shed to wait, some lying on the straw, some sitting up. The majority were sufferers from "piedi ingelati"—or trench feet. Such as could not walk, but did not need stretchers, were carried from the shed to the train, a considerable distance, on the backs of two or three sturdy fellows who made nothing but a joke of it and showed no signs of fatigue. The spectacle of one soldier clinging to the back of another would ordinarily be anything but impressive, but there was so much kindness and cheerfulness on the part of the bearer, and so much content on the part of the other, that all the comic element disappeared and one thought only of the humanity of man to man that can follow man's appalling inhumanity. Besides, war makes so many odd things natural.

Except for a wound-dressing compartment, the kitchen, and the medical officers' quarters, the train was wholly given to patients. I hesitate to say how many compartments there were, each containing

two double rows of bunks, perhaps eight in a row, but I should be surprised if there were fewer than thirty. I know that to walk through it unburdened took a considerable time; but Mrs. Watkins and her ladies walked through it carrying jugs and baskets (which had to be refilled two or three hundred yards away across the mud), and took it all as a matter of course. No light task, I can assure you; but, like all the ministering angels whom I have met in this war, these refused assistance. It was their job and they preferred to do it alone. Chivalry, at any rate in its more superficial forms, has had a poor time of late. The war is so exacting an employer that its servants have come to realize that they must do their own work individually or something will go wrong.

I have mentioned elsewhere the impression of dark and pathetically patient eyes that one receives in Italian hospitals. Here again, walking along this interminable train filled with the innocent victims of other men's ambition, it was the dark, pathetically patient eyes of the wounded that one saw first and will remember last. Many of the men were cheery enough—for were they not bound for the comforts of Milan hospitals, with the front far away?—and many laughed; but the dominant impression once more was of dark eyes pathetically patient, with no resentment against fate, but far from understanding what it all meant.

VIII

AND so this record closes. I do not pretend to have dealt as they deserve with all the deeply interesting and moving things that I was privileged to see. My pen is not equal to that task, even, as I have said elsewhere, were it not undesirable for military reasons. But I hope I have said enough to prove to English people at home how finely their representatives are upholding the old country's traditions of helpfulness and kindliness.

As we walked back from the hospital train, every man in it having had his coffee and his roll, Mrs. Watkins made a remark to me which I have often remembered since, and always with a sense of pity and of tears. To her, she said—and, after her long experience in France early in the war, where she established a canteen for the French and English wounded, and now, later, in Italy she thinks of little but of the needs of fighting men, and especially perhaps of the needs of the less articulate and the less fortunate ones who have come so continually under her notice—to her the symbol of this war is that pencil drawing of two clasped and pleading hands which a German artist made, long ago, before Prussia came into existence, and before kultur and ruthless ambition had descended upon his race.

Every one knows the drawing; it is one of Dürer's most beautiful. To her these hands are ever visible, appealing for help. They typify the prayer of the wounded and weary; and it is the blessed fortune of herself and her associates, and of the British Red Cross, to be able to respond to the gesture.

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